

To the best of our knowledge there are no snow geese maintained in captivity in India and so the possibility of this bird being an escapee from collections within the country is remote. We therefore conclude that the snow goose should be once again added to the list of Indian avifauna.

The breeding range of the snow goose extends from north-east Siberia, west to north-west Greenland and across arctic North America (Cramp and Simmons; 1977). The wintering grounds in Asia are in east China and Japan. In Europe it is considered an annual vagrant, but due to escapees from waterfowl collections there, the status there remains impossible to determine. The bulk of the arctic population however winters in North America and mainly around the Gulf of Mexico.

The snow goose should at present be strictly considered as a vagrant here. One possible explanation for its presence in India may be that the bird travelled

down with the cold front that caused a severe winter over much of north and central Asia during December 1988 and January 1989.

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October 16, 1989 SHIVRAJKUMAR KHACHAR

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## 8. SHIKRA ACCIPITER BADIUS TAKING CARRION

A blue rock pigeon *Columba livia* was found dead on 6 June 1988, at 0600 hrs on the lawn of Darbargadh palace at Jasdan in Saurashtra, Gujarat. It had been killed by the palace dogs the previous night. House crows *Corvus splendens* fed on the corpse during the morning and at 1400 hrs a shikra *Accipiter badius* was observed feeding on it. Disturbed by our presence it flew with the carcass to a tree in the compound. Raptors are opportunists and species of the genus *Aquila* and *Haliaeetus* are known to feed frequently on carrion when opportunity avails (Ali and Ripley 1978, Brown and Amadon 1968, Brown *et. al.* 1982, Cramp and Simmons 1983, Clark and Wheeler 1987, Gensbol 1987). This appears to be an uncommon feeding behaviour among *Accipiters*. Ali and Ripley (1978), Brown and Amadon (1968), Brown *et. al.* (1982), and Cramp and Simmons (1983) make no mention of this habit though Newton (1986) states that the only

evidence that the closely related sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* take carrion (apart from their previous kills) was the fact that they were occasionally poisoned when they took meat baits put out by gamekeepers. A photograph by B.E. Swann (in Gensbol 1987) shows a goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* and white-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* at laid out carrion in winter.

Apparently *Accipiters* do take carrion in times of stress but this is the first record of a shikra doing so. Incidentally Saurashtra at this time was reeling under the third consecutive year of drought, but the two pairs of shikra I observed successfully reared young. The shikra was a daily visitor to the compound. Probably the same individual was earlier observed taking a displaying adult magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis* vulnerably exposed near its nest box.

November 22, 1989

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9. CALLS OF HARRIERS (*CIRCUS* SPP.) NEAR HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH

We have been monitoring the roosting behaviour of three species of harriers — marsh harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Montagu's harrier *C. pygargus* and pale harrier *C. macrourus* which come to roost on the ground in a grassland 18 km north of Hyderabad.

Before roosting the harriers show a pre-roost behaviour by flying over their roost site just before or after sunset. It was during this time that we heard some of the birds making a distinct shrill call. There is, however, no record of any such call for these birds in their wintering grounds (HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1983). But in all our four years (1985-89) of watching them, we have recorded them calling.

We heard the birds calling about 300 m from us. Twice a male Montagu's harrier came close to us. Its call, roughly *keck-keck-keck*, lasted a few seconds.

Male pale harriers also gave a similar but a more shrill call. Marsh harriers have, however, remained silent.

The calls were heard throughout their wintering period (September to February), but were seen to be dependent on the number of birds during the pre-roost. If only a few birds came to roost then no call was heard. We also never heard any call at any other time of the day.

The exact purpose of such calls remains a mystery, but perhaps it has something to do with identifying its own species in the mixed pre-roost gathering. It is also not clear whether only males of the above two species call, since in the pre-roost gathering it is impossible to distinguish from a distance the species and sex which are calling.

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10. BLUEBREASTED BANDED RAIL *RALLUS STRIATUS* LINN. NESTING IN KERALA

According to the BIRDS OF KERALA (Ali, S. 1969) the nesting of the bluebreasted banded rail *Rallus striatus* had not been recorded from Kerala. According to the Report of the Vernay Survey of the Eastern Ghats (1936, *JBNHS* 38: 690) J. Darling found a nest with five eggs in a swamp at Sultan's Battery, Wynaad, on 26 August 1874. There seems to be no later report of the breeding of this rail in Kerala. We place on record the discovery of a nest of this bird at Kavassery (Palghat district, Kerala, c. 90 m above msl).

On 28 July 1989 Achuthankutty Nair, while walking along a bund in his paddy fields in the evening, saw a waterhen-like bird flying out of a dense growth of grass and lentils almost at his feet. This led to his discovery of a nest containing 5 eggs. He showed me the nest the next morning. After that, we frequently visited the nest and spent about an hour every time in the hope

of seeing the occupants of the nest. At 0930 hrs on 30 July 1989 there were seven eggs in the nest; at 0900 hrs on 1 August 1989, it contained eight eggs; and at 1700 hrs on 2 August, nine eggs. No more eggs were laid. On our visit on 10 August 1989, the bird was so agitated that we decided to leave the nest alone for some days. On our next visit at 1745 hrs on 15 August 1989, we found that all the eggs had hatched. Nine egg-shells, each with a large hole on one side, were in the nest. We could not find the chicks or the parents anywhere in the vicinity. **Occupants of the nest:** Eight times — on 28 July, 30 July, 1 August (once in the morning and again in the evening), 2 August, 6 August and 10 August — a bird was flushed from the nest. But on most occasions, apart from noting that it was a rail smaller than a whitebreasted waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, we could not get any details as the bird just fluttered into